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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 006519

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NATWAR DECRIES BANGLADESHI DENIAL, QUESTIONS SAARC SUMMIT

REF: NEW DELHI 6414

Classified By: Ambassador David Mulford for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) The Ambassador used an August 23 meeting with Foreign Minister Natwar Singh to probe Indian thinking on next steps in Bangladesh, underling our hope that we will be able to develop the same kind of fluid information exchange and close coordination of diplomatic strategies that characterizes our approach to the crisis in Nepal. Natwar warmed quickly to the topic, recounting his frustration about the sense of denial he encountered when he raised concern about Islamic fundamentalism during his recent visit to Dhaka.

2. (C) Natwar explained that he had gone to Bangladesh in hopes of clearing the air and setting the stage for a positive visit by Prime Minister Singh during the November SAARC Summit. "I went there to send the message that we meant well," the Minister exclaimed, but when he asked about Indian terrorists taking refuge in Bangladesh, the answer he got is "there's nobody." He contrasted this state of denial with Musharraf, who at least acknowledges a problem with radical Islamists in Pakistan.

3. (C) Natwar was predictably critical of Bangladesh Minister of Industry Motiur Rahman Nizami's public suggestion that India was to blame for the August 17 bombings, calling him "a communalist and a jihadi." After acknowledging the Bangladesh Foreign Minister's clarification that Nizami's statement was a personal view, Natwar expressed concern that "Bangladesh is a secular state sliding into chaos and fundamentalism."

4. (C) Natwar had no good answers in response to the Ambassador's request for practical suggestions about how to reverse Bangladesh's slide towards radicalism. For the first time since August 17, the Minister privately questioned the November SAARC Summit, stating that "I don't know whether the SAARC Summit will take place" given the current climate of violence. Concluding, he labeled the Bangladeshis "a decent people governed by a group that doesn't inspire confidence."

5. (C) Comment: Natwar's bitter private comments on the August 17 bombings contrast with the GOI's careful public line (reftel), and reflects a deepening sense of Indian impatience about the GOB's failure to come to terms with the threat posed by terrorist groups inside Bangladesh. The upcoming visit to New York (and perhaps Washington) by Foreign Secretary Saran is a good chance for us to have a frank sharing of views about what lies behind the August 17 bombings and what we can do together to help Bangladesh restore a stable and secular democracy.

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